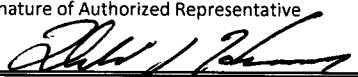


# BROADBAND EXPANSION GRANT APPLICATION

## For Fiscal Year 2022

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Primary Applicant (Name and Address):</b></p> <p>Hillsboro Telephone Co., Inc.<br/>P.O. Box 427<br/>121 Mill St.<br/>Hillsboro, WI 54634</p>   | <p>Applications <b>MUST</b> be <b>UPLOADED</b> to ERF via the Commission's website,<br/><a href="http://psc.wi.gov/apps35/ERF_upload/content/mymenu.aspx">http://psc.wi.gov/apps35/ERF_upload/content/mymenu.aspx</a>. Refer to section 2.3 for detailed instructions.</p> <p>Applications are due and <b>MUST</b> be uploaded to ERF no later than: <b>March 17, 2022</b> at 4:00pm (16:00) Central Time. <b>Late applications will not be accepted.</b></p> |
|  | <p>Contact for further information:<br/><a href="mailto:PSCStatebroadbandoffice@wisconsin.gov">PSCStatebroadbandoffice@wisconsin.gov</a></p>  |
|  | <p>Date:<br/>December 1, 2021</p>   |
| <p>The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin is seeking applications for Broadband Expansion Grants. The Commission may award one or more grants during Fiscal Year 2022 to public and private entities that meet the eligibility requirements set forth in Wis. Stat. § 196.504. This grant round will be funded with bond proceeds authorized by the Wisconsin Building Commission pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 13.48(30). As such, successful applicants are subject to the requirements of Wis. Stat. § 13.48(30). Successful applicants will demonstrate a clear and achievable plan to improve broadband communications services in one or more underserved areas in the State.</p>   |   |
| <p><b>Applicant Certification:</b> In signing this application, the undersigned verifies under penalty of perjury that the Applicant and its employees and agents have not, either directly or indirectly, entered into any agreement or participated in any collusion or otherwise taken any action in restraint of free competition with respect to this application; that no attempt has been made to induce any other person or firm to submit or not to submit an application; that this application has been independently arrived at without collusion with any other proposer, competitor or potential competitor; that this application has not been knowingly disclosed prior to the opening of applications to any other applicant or competitor; that all of the responses and representations of Applicant in this application are true and correct to the best of the undersigned's knowledge, information, and belief; and that Applicant agrees to, accepts, and will comply with all of the terms and conditions respecting this application and any award of a broadband expansion grant as may be established in a grant award Agreement.</p> |   |
| <p>Name of Authorized Representative (Type or Print)</p> <p>Donald J. Hammer</p>   | <p>Title</p> <p>General Manager</p>   |
| <p>Phone (608) 489-4410</p>  |   |
| <p>Signature of Authorized Representative</p>   | <p>Date</p> <p>3-16-2022</p>  |

## SUMMARY OF GRANT APPLICATION

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Primary Applicant Name<br><br>Hillsboro Telephone Co., Inc.   | Amount of Broadband Grant Request (round to nearest dollar)<br><br>\$310,894                |
| Federal Employer Identification No.<br><br>39-0907995   | Amount of Matching Funds Pledged (round to nearest dollar)<br><br>\$103,632                 |
| Contact Name and Title<br><br>Donald J. Hammer, General Manager   | Total Cost of Proposed Project (round to nearest dollar)<br><br>\$414,526                   |
| Telephone Number<br>(608) 489-4410  | Project Name<br>NE Corner of Vernon   |
| E-mail Address(es)<br><br>djhammer@hillsborotel.com   | Type of Proposed Broadband Service (FTTH, Cable, DSL, etc.)<br><br>Fiber to the Home (FTTH) |
| Grant Manager, if different than Primary Applicant  | Type of Proposed Project (Last-mile, Middle-Mile, backbone, other)<br><br>Last-mile         |
| Grant Manager Contact Name  | Grant Manager Email Address and Telephone Number  |
| If the application proposes a public-private partnership, list the names, addresses, and FEINs of the partner companies or organizations<br><br>Not Applicable  |   |
| Brief Project Description (2 sentences)<br>Hillsboro Telephone Co. Inc.'s proposed project will provide much needed broadband service to 31 underserved locations in Vernon County, providing much needed broadband connectivity and affording access to remote learning, remote working, and telehealth. The proposed project will construct Active Ethernet Fiber-to-the-Home giving residents scalable fiber offerings with several broadband options. |   |
| Maximum Proposed Download Transmission Speed<br>500 Mbps  | Maximum Proposed Upload Transmission Speed<br>500 Mbps                                      |
| Minimum Proposed Download Speed to Customer Location<br>100 Mbps  | Minimum Proposed Upload Transmission Speed to Customer Location<br>100 Mbps                 |
| County or Counties served by this project<br>Vernon County  | Community or Communities served by this project<br>Elroy                                    |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| List of the broadband service providers, if any, currently serving the area the applicant proposes to serve<br><br>Wireline: CenturyLink<br>Other Technologies: Bug Tussel Wireless   |  |
| Does proposed project serve an <u>unserved</u> area of the State, as defined in <u>Section 1.4</u> of the application instruction? (yes/no)<br><br>No   | Is the Applicant certified as a Broadband Forward! Community or Telecommuter Forward! Community, or does the grant project propose to serve a Broadband Forward! Community or Telecommuter Forward! Community? (yes/no)<br><br>Yes           |
| For last mile projects or component the expected number of Business Locations that will have access to the improved broadband service (i.e., total business locations passed or with new service access).<br>0 Business Locations | For last mile projects or components the expected number of Residential Locations that will have access to the improved broadband service (i.e., total residential locations passed or with new service access).<br>31 Residential Locations |
| Of the improved business locations, how many locations are <u>unserved</u> ?<br>0 Business Locations  | Of the improved residential locations, how many are <u>unserved</u> ?<br>0 Residential Locations   |
| For providers that are eligible telecommunications carriers will the proposed broadband service be available to Lifeline customers? (yes/no)<br>Yes   | Are there any programs available for low-income households to access low-cost service or discounts? (yes/no)<br>No   |
| Is the internet service provider currently participating in the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program? (yes/no)<br>No   | Is the internet service provider currently participating in the Department of Public Instruction and CESA purchasing's Digital Learning Bridge? (yes/no)<br>No   |
| Did the internet service provider participate in the Public Service Commission's voluntary Broadband Coverage Data Collection in 2021? (yes/no)<br>No   |  |

## Summary of Project Budget and Funding Statement

### FY22 Broadband Expansion Grant Application Budget & Income Summary



Please complete this form using Microsoft Excel. A PDF copy must be attached to your application as page four. In addition, this form must also be uploaded to ERF in Excel format.

#### Grant Summary

|                                   |                     |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Grant Applicant:                  | Project:            |
| Hillsboro Telephone Company, Inc. | NE Corner of Vernon |

#### Budget

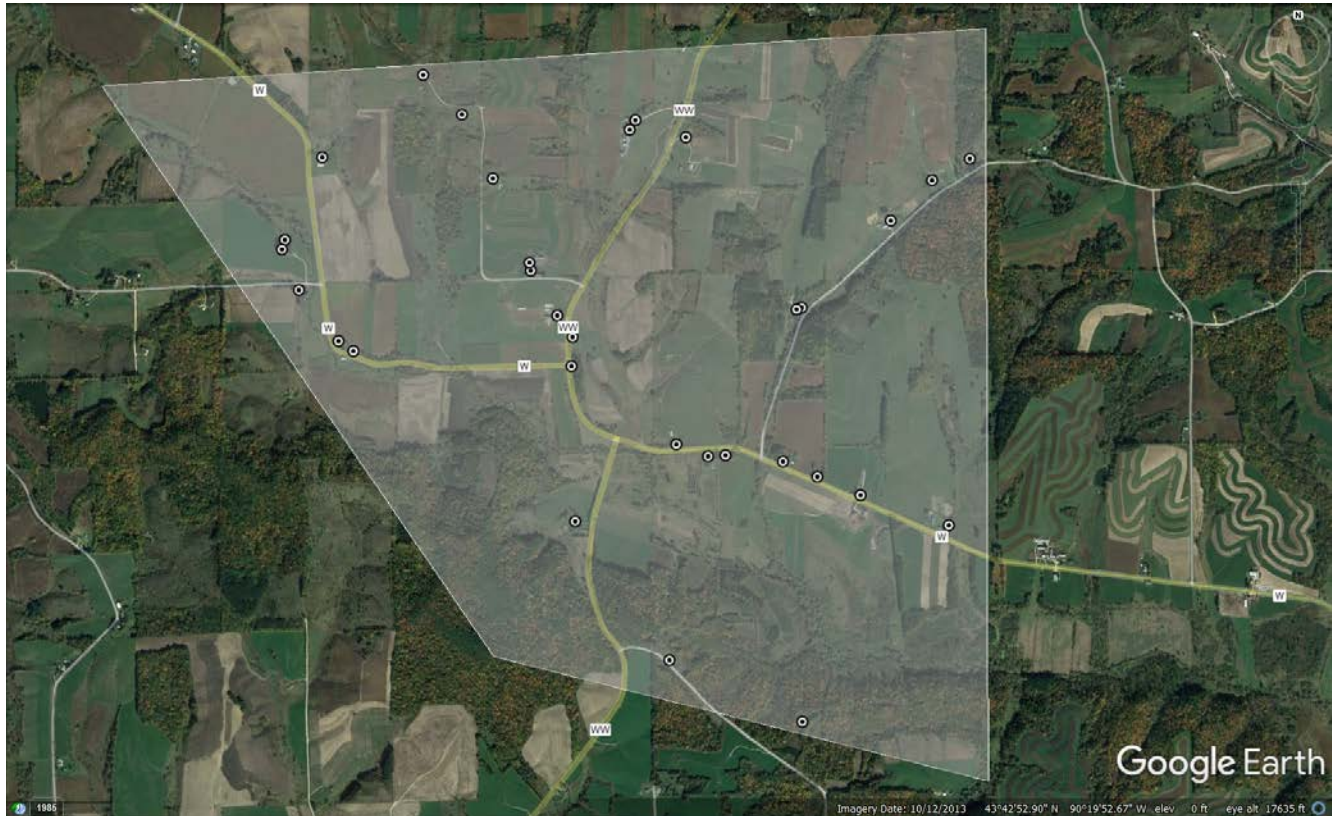
| Line:  | Description / Category:      | Grant Funds:  | Match:        | Total:                |
|--------|------------------------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| 1      | Contractual, Consultant Fees | \$ 205,967.00 | \$ 68,657.00  | \$ 274,624.00         |
| 2      | Equipment                    | \$ 16,231.00  | \$ 5,410.00   | \$ 21,641.00          |
| 3      | Supplies                     | \$ 46,087.00  | \$ 15,362.00  | \$ 61,449.00          |
| 4      | Labor (Salary, Fringe)       | \$ 9,300.00   | \$ 3,100.00   | \$ 12,400.00          |
| 5      | Permitting, Licensing Fees   | \$ 33,309.00  | \$ 11,103.00  | \$ 44,412.00          |
| 6      | Travel                       |               |               | \$ -                  |
| 7      | Other                        |               |               | \$ -                  |
| Total: |                              | \$ 310,894.00 | \$ 103,632.00 | \$ 414,526.00         |
|        |                              |               |               | 25.0% match requested |

#### Pledged Contributions

| #:     | Entity:                           | Entity Type: | Pledge Type: | Pledge:       |
|--------|-----------------------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| 1      | Hillsboro Telephone Company, Inc. | Applicant    | Cash         | \$ 103,632.00 |
| 2      |                                   |              |              |               |
| 3      |                                   |              |              |               |
| 4      |                                   |              |              |               |
| 5      |                                   |              |              |               |
| 6      |                                   |              |              |               |
| 7      |                                   |              |              |               |
| 8      |                                   |              |              |               |
| 9      |                                   |              |              |               |
| 10     |                                   |              |              |               |
| Total: |                                   |              |              | \$ 103,632.00 |

### 3.2.2 Description of the Project

#### a. Static Map



#### b. Demonstrate Actual Service Available

Hillsboro does have 23 project locations included that are depicted as served in the Wisconsin Broadband Map however, Appendix A includes the supporting data that the areas are underserved. Specifically, 15 of the locations that are depicted as served on the Wisconsin Broadband Map the reported existing provider's website returned results of the actual speed(s) available at the addresses in question, and results returned were under 25Mbps download and 3Mbps upload. The remaining 8 location show combinations of Bug Tussel and CenturyLink as the providers however Bug Tussel is a fixed wireless provider and due to the location's heavily wooded topography, in all likelihood the fixed wireless signal would not penetrate through foliage rendering the location as underserved. As a result of this research all 23 locations are being included as underserved.

### **c. Explanation of how the Proposed Project will Increase Broadband Access**

Hillsboro Telephone Co., Inc. (hereinafter Hillsboro)’s proposed project will increase broadband access in portions of the following communities: Elroy. The proposed project is expected to provide service to 31 households, specifically no designated unserved and 31 underserved locations, as well as 0 businesses locations. The project area has approximately 2 seasonal residents and tourists that will be served with the proposed project.

Hillsboro proposed to serve these locations with up to 500 Mbps symmetrical service. The download/upload speed packages that will be available to customers available for purchase is provided below:

| Residential Broadband Fiber Internet       |          |
|--|----------|
| 500/500 Mbps                               | \$300.00 |
| 100/100 Mbps                               | \$110.00 |
| 75/10 Mbps                                 | \$69.99  |
| 50/10 Mbps                                 | \$49.99  |
| Business Broadband Fiber Internet Packages |          |
| 500/500 Mbps                               | \$300.00 |
| 100/100 Mbps                               | \$110.00 |
| 100/50 Mbps                                | \$149.99 |
| 50/25 Mbps                                 | \$59.99  |

### **d. Proposed Project Infrastructure Type**

Hillsboro’s proposed project is a last mile infrastructure project with FTTH design constructed over forward looking fiber facilities.

### **e. Description of Broadband Technology**

Hillsboro is proposing to provide up to 500/500 Mbps symmetrical service to both residential and business customers in the proposed project area. These speeds are based on dedicated bandwidth.

Hillsboro proposes to construct facilities as an Active Ethernet Fiber to the Home (FTTH) network, giving each customer their own dedicated fiber from the residence back to the network access equipment. Active Ethernet is a point-to-point technology that connects an Optical Line Terminal (OLT) to remote Optical Network Terminals (ONTs), also known as Optical Network Units (ONUs). An Active Ethernet network has a direct point to point connection from the OLT to the subscriber ONT location. Each optical connection provides a dedicated link from the network to the subscriber. Point-to-Point topologies provide dedicated symmetric connection rates for each residential and business subscriber. These connections provide dedicated bandwidth to the subscriber that is not shared. The proposed technology allows a rate of up to a symmetrical 10Gbps Down/10Gbps Up and beyond for IP transport of video, broadband, and OTT video between Hillsboro’s Host office and every premise in the proposed project areas.

Hillsboro will use an Active Fiber-to-the-Home (FTTH) direct buried architecture which will access the new network. Hillsboro plans to use an Active FTTH access vendor such as Calix for the last mile access. The proposed technology allows a rate of up to a symmetrical 10Gbps Down/10Gbps Up IP transport of voice, broadband, and OTT video between Hillsboro's Host office and the customer premise. This architecture can be upgraded as needed to any speed, delivering up to 40G service and beyond, as needed in the future. The active design will allow for any additional type of service that may be required by the government or business. New Redundant Core and Aggregation Routers will be deployed as needed. The middle mile data is uplinked to the Internet via a 10Gbps access on a 2Gbps connection from the Host office to the carrier fiber in the area. The additional capacity will be added as needed. Where possible, all the equipment sites will be served with separate multiple 10G IP ringed transport fibers. Active ONT's and WiFi routers will be placed at the customer premise with the ability to upgrade as needed. The customers will be provided with the option of either an indoor or outdoor ONT.

#### **g. Project Schedule**

If the grant application for the project is approved by May 2022, the project schedule identified as pending grant approval will be completed within 24 months. Hillsboro proposes to use the following schedule which it has developed based on similar projects it has completed:

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| March 2022 | Project planning and pre-engineering  |
| May 2022   | Pending grant approval, order and stage equipment*                                    |
| April 2023 | Pending grant approval, community notice and outreach                                 |
| May 2023   | Pending grant approval, bury new backbone, distribution, and feeder fiber             |
| March 2024 | Pending grant approval, testing, set-up & install electronics at subscriber locations |

\*Hillsboro is aware of the supply chain delays and has budgeted for 6-9 months based on similar project timelines.

#### **3.2.3 Itemized Budget**

The Summary of Project Budget is included in this application as page 4. A majority of the cost is derived from the purchase, plowing, splicing, and boring of fiber facilities and accounts for \$348,473 of the total project. The Central Office Card Equipment, OLT, and ONT electronic equipment accounts for \$21,641. The proposed project also includes engineering and permitting costs, totaling \$44,412.

A detailed price list of materials is provided below:

| <b>Unit</b>   | <b>Cost</b> |
|---------------|-------------|
| BFOI 24       | \$1.49      |
| BFOI 48       | \$1.59      |
| BFOV(.75)     | \$0.35      |
| BHF (24"x36") | \$499       |

|                 |        |
|-----------------|--------|
| BM 2 (5/8)(8)   | \$14.5 |
| BM 53F          | \$50   |
| BM 53F (LS)     | \$43   |
| BFOV(1.25)(1)   | \$0.58 |
| BM 61 DROP BORE | \$0.35 |
| BM 61D          | \$0.58 |
| BM 71           | \$0    |
| BM 83           | \$37   |
| HBFO (Small)    | \$236  |
| HO-1            | \$0    |
| HO-1P           | \$0    |
| SEB-FOC (L)     | \$0    |
| SEB-FOC (M)     | \$1    |
| WBHF            | \$20   |
| WHBFO           | \$0    |
| WHO-1           | \$0    |

As shown in the proposed budget on page 4, Hillsboro is planning on using the requested grant funds solely for the purpose of constructing a FTTH network in order to provide broadband in the underserved locations of the project area. The budget includes the following costs for constructing broadband infrastructure:

- Project planning that takes place during the performance period.
- Obtaining construction permits.
- Construction of facilities for “last mile” infrastructure.
- Installation and testing of the broadband service.

Hillsboro further affirms that the grant, if awarded, will not be used to contribute to the operating costs of the telecommunications provider, including the expenses of a telecommunications provider or the monthly bills of telecommunications customers.

### **3.2.4 Priority Factors Supporting the Application**

#### **A. Matching Funds**

The matching fund contributions for the proposed project, if granted, would be recognized in the 25% project match of grant funds received. The company makes a firm commitment of its 25% cash match of project costs to funding. Hillsboro will be contributing \$103,632 in cash to the overall proposed project. Hillsboro is requesting grant funding in the amount of \$310,894 to complete the proposed project.

#### **B. Public-private Partnerships**

While Hillsboro is always open to participating with public partners, this project does not entail a public-private partnership.

#### **c. Existing Broadband Service**



The entire proposed project area meets the definition of un/underserved as defined by the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin in the Application Guide definitions.

The list of broadband providers reporting to provide broadband in portions of the proposed project area include, 1) Wireline: CenturyLink, 2) Fixed Wireless: Bug Tussel, United States Cellular Corporation, 3) Satellite: Viasat, VSAT Systems, LLC, and 4) Mobile: AT&T Mobility, Verizon Wireless and U.S. Cellular Corporation.

Hillsboro utilized the Wisconsin Broadband Map as the basis for determining eligible locations and as a means of verifying broadband availability, or lack thereof. Hillsboro's 31 project locations as depicted on the Wisconsin Broadband Map show 8 underserved and classified 23 as served. Based on this information, Hillsboro conducted additional research using the addresses within the proposed project area, based on those results, Hillsboro is further asserting and substantiating that broadband is not available from the provider(s) listed.

Hillsboro does have 23 project locations included that are depicted as served in the Wisconsin Broadband Map however, Appendix A includes the supporting data that the areas are underserved. Specifically, 15 of the locations that are depicted as served on the Wisconsin Broadband Map the reported existing provider's website returned results of the actual speed(s) available at the addresses in question, and results returned were under 25Mbps download and 3Mbps upload. The remaining 8 location show combinations of Bug Tussel and CenturyLink as the providers however Bug Tussel is a fixed wireless provider and due to the location's heavily wooded topography, in all likelihood the fixed wireless signal would not penetrate through foliage rendering the location as underserved. As a result of this research all 23 locations are being included as underserved.

#### **d. Project Impact**

The proposed project will serve very rural areas of Vernon County with the closest neighbor community of substance being Elroy. The project will have significant impact for residential and business subscribers in the area by providing broadband speeds of up to 500Mbps to all FTTH locations in the project area. The project will provide significantly improved broadband services to locations that currently struggle to access sufficient broadband to support working remotely, remote learning, access to telemedicine, and e-commerce. The broadband packages will include:

| Residential Broadband Fiber Internet       |          |
|--|----------|
| 500/500 Mbps                               | \$300.00 |
| 100/100 Mbps                               | \$110.00 |
| 75/10 Mbps                                 | \$69.99  |
| 50/10 Mbps                                 | \$49.99  |
| Business Broadband Fiber Internet Packages |          |
| 500/500 Mbps                               | \$300.00 |
| 100/100 Mbps                               | \$110.00 |
| 100/50 Mbps                                | \$149.99 |
| 50/25 Mbps                                 | \$59.99  |

The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the great need for access to sufficient broadband speeds in the very rural communities that today currently lack such access. Hillsboro's proposed project will ensure all rural

residents in the proposed project area have equitable access to qualified broadband which will assist with the economic recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **e. Scalability**

The Hillsboro proposed project design has been created in a manner to accommodate future growth by upgrading the electronics. Hillsboro will use an Active Ethernet Fiber-To-The Home (FTTH) buried network. Active Ethernet is a point-to-point technology that connects an Optical Line Terminal (OLT) to remote Optical Network Terminals (ONTs), also known as Optical Network Units (ONUs). An Active Ethernet network has a direct point to point connection from the OLT to the subscriber ONT location. Each optical connection provides a dedicated link from the network to the subscriber. The fiber loop plant provisioned as part of this FTTH project is using a combination of 288, 96, and 24 strand fiber and will have spare fiber throughout the project area to accommodate additional homes and business new to the area, affording them the same dedicated point-to-point connectivity.

The services being provided to this rural area upon project completion include a 100/100 symmetrical FTTH broadband service and a 500/500 Mbps broadband service. The installed FTTH network is capable of providing up to 10Gbps services with the electronics included in the project, if and as the bandwidth needs of the locations in the project area increase Hillsboro will upgrade the existing electronics and the dedicated Active Ethernet FTTH plant will be capable of transmitting higher speeds.

The proposed project area is rural in nature with heavily forested terrain and neighbored by State Parks which creates additional difficulties when deploying broadband and renders FTTH as the most reliable and forward-looking technology to provision broadband service to this area in a future proof manner.

The FTTH proposed network will connect back to the existing Hillsboro fiber network facilities maximizing efficiencies and network monitoring capabilities.

#### **f. Economic Development**

Hillsboro's proposed project will strengthen economic development opportunities by promoting job growth in the local community, promoting job retention, expanding the property tax base and improving the overall economic vitality of the region. The lack of broadband creates additional burden and complications when attempting to access resources both inside and outside of the community.

According to U.S. Census data, 59.6% of Vernon County participates in the civilian labor force with. Many businesses and the federal government rely on video conferencing platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Teams to conduct business because of the pandemic. High upload speeds are necessary to adequately participate in a video conference meeting. The current levels of service available in the proposed project area leave residents with little choice in internet service providers, with many relying on mobile hotspot technology to access the internet via their cellular device. This type of service quickly becomes prohibitively expensive. With a FTTH connection, telecommuting becomes more feasible, which in turn makes homes in the proposed project area more valuable.

Affordable, high-speed internet access not only benefits current residents, but it attracts potential residents as well. With increased interest in an area comes higher real estate values, larger property taxes, and more opportunities for further community investment. Researchers from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater found that access to faster internet services, like the proposed project, increases the value of a

home by thousands of dollars, equivalent to the addition of a fireplace or approximately half the value of adding a bathroom. Studies from the University of Colorado and Carnegie Mellon University have confirmed these findings. The Wall Street Journal, *How Fast Internet Affects Home Prices*, Ryan Knutson (June 2015). <https://web.archive.org/web/20201021095911/https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-fast-internet-affects-home-pricesfast-internet-access-can-boost-a-homes-value-1435694077?tesla=y>).

Reliable, high-speed broadband is crucial for attracting long-term investment and creating jobs in this area. By allowing residents access to faster internet, they will in turn have access more job opportunities outside of those in the local areas. Many job applications require applicants to use electronic platforms such as LinkedIn, Indeed, Salesforce, and others to apply for open positions. Access to more reliable, faster internet would not only allow them to apply for more positions using these platforms but give them access to jobs outside of the local area, inevitably increasing the income they will earn and the tax base of the region. In turn, local business owners can rely on these electronic platforms to hire more people, also improving the local economy and strengthening the local businesses.

Local businesses would also run much more efficiently with access to better Internet. According to 2020 U.S. Census data, there are 613 physical businesses in Vernon County. Restaurants, bars, convenience stores, and others would also be able to market their services to a wider audience and attract more customers with stronger internet speeds. If successful, local business could then employ more residents. Businesses would also have access to a wider market for supplies, allowing them to run their businesses more efficiently and with less interruptions due to weak internet connections. Lastly, access to reliable internet would allow for local bars and restaurants to take full advantage of online ordering and delivery options like Postmates, UberEats, and DoorDash to expand their customer base. Thus, an FTTH connection as proposed by Hillsboro herein creates significant potential for economic development, particularly in rural, sparsely populated areas.

#### **g. Effect Upon Broadband Service to Adjacent Areas**

Hillsboro's proposed project will not impair the ability of a broadband service provider or competing broadband service provider to extend broadband service to areas adjacent to the proposed project area. Hillsboro does not have any exclusive easement or ROW contracts in place.

### **3.2.5 Other Information Supporting the Application**

#### **a. Applicant's History**

Hillsboro, headquartered in Hillsboro, Wisconsin, is an independent, family operated company that has been a cornerstone business, providing telecommunications services to its community since 1947. Hillsboro's current exchange area covers approximately 150 square miles in eastern Vernon County as well as small portions of Juneau, Sauk, Richland, and Monroe counties.

Hillsboro can meet the build out requirements based on the information currently known and has a proven track record for successful deployment of broadband service. The company has experience with constructing and maintaining FTTP networks, completing an average of 50 miles of FTTP build annually.

Hillsboro consistently completes its FTTP builds on time and within budget. To date, Hillsboro has constructed Active Ethernet FTTH networks to the entirety of the customer base. Most recently, Hillsboro completed its fiber buildout in Union Center, covering 2 square miles and connecting 115

locations. Hillsboro has also proven that they can complete broadband projects in a timely manner. Specifically, as an Alternative Connect America Cost Model (ACAM-I revised) participant and has fully constructed their locations as of December 2020, meeting their buildout obligations 7 years ahead of the required timeline established by the FCC. Therefore, Hillsboro is familiar with the timeline and requirements to complete the proposed build in Wisconsin.

#### **b. Proposed Project Will Not Duplicate Existing Broadband Infrastructure**

Hillsboro's proposed project will not duplicate existing broadband infrastructure. Hillsboro has reviewed the locations it proposes to serve and confirmed, using the Wisconsin Broadband Map, that the locations are not served by more than one provider in the area currently. In areas where wireless service is alleged to be provided, due to the wooded nature of the area, the service received is not capable of the speeds reported. Residents in the proposed project area report they have no access to fast broadband from their incumbent provider.

The funding provided under this program will help Hillsboro expand its network outside of its current service area, greatly improving broadband speeds delivered in these areas and provide scalable technology that will allow the customers in this region to rely on their services for years to come.

#### **c. Description of Applicant's Financial Ability to Undertake the Project**

Hillsboro can undertake the proposed broadband construction project and has a proven track record for successful deployment of fiber facilities. The company has been providing telecommunication services for 75 years and has successfully completed similar infrastructure projects during its years in operation. Since it began providing internet services in 1994, Hillsboro has transitioned all of its customers from copper to fiber facilities. Hillsboro currently serves 1,600 customers throughout several towns and villages in Juneau and Vernon Counties. Examples of successfully completed infrastructure projects of comparable and greater scale include the ACAM and Village of Union Center projects.

The broadband subscription rate for the completed Union Center project is 50% of locations and it is anticipated that the proposed area will have comparable subscription rates. Hillsboro is prepared to provide broadband support after the build and installation as customer service and technicians provide support either by phone or onsite depending on the issue. Customer turnover is minimal, with an average rate of less than 5%.

Hillsboro has strong financials which will allow them to complete the proposed project and provide the 25% match. The company is willing to provide the most recent financial statements upon request.

#### **f. Proposed Project's Impact on Telehealth**

The closest hospital to the proposed area, Saint Joseph's, is over 30 miles away. The closest critical care center is several towns over from the proposed area. The time and cost it takes to travel to see a doctor in these regions is truly a commitment. With faster, more reliable broadband the challenges of taking off work to drive long distances to see a doctor or specialist is removed. High-speed broadband allows physicians to provide rural patients with online services, giving these residents access to specialists they would not normally be able to access.

Specifically, according to 2020 U.S. Census data, the population of persons 65-years and older in Vernon County is over 20%. Access to telehealth also significantly benefits the elderly population often reliant upon others for transportation to medical appointments as well as creating a cost savings for those on a fixed budget as they are able to reduce expenses associated with in-person visits such as gas or transportation fees. Improved broadband also helps maintain upgraded and accurate health records since doctors could better monitor patients through telehealth.

#### **g. Proposed Project's Impact on Access to Educational Opportunities**

Hillsboro's proposed project in the rural area of Vernon County will deliver speeds of up to 500 Mbps to each location. According to the U.S. Census data, 26.1% of the population in this area is between 5-18 years of age. Hillsboro's proposed speed offerings are more than adequate for multiple students within the same household to simultaneously stream live classroom feeds for virtual school attendance, conduct research for household assignments, access and complete testing and will provide general access to all educational opportunities available via broadband connections.

#### **h. Grant Application Support**

Hillsboro's proposed project is located in Vernon County which is a certified Telecommuter Forward! Community. The company is open to working with the community; however, Hillsboro has not received any contribution of funds, easements or permissions of use to date for the proposed project.

#### **i. Letters of Support**

While the company has not received physical letters of support for its proposed project, the company has received immense verbal support from the residents in the proposed project area.

#### **j. Discussion on Equitable Factors Pursuant to Wisconsin Statute § 196.03(6)**

Hillsboro is committed to providing reasonably adequate telecommunications service or a reasonable and just charge for that telecommunications service as indicated under Wis. Stat. § 196.03(6). The proposed project would enhance each of the equitable factors outlined in the statute.

The proposed project would allow for residents and businesses in the area to have more than one option for Internet service. This, in turn, would enhance not only the promotion of consumer choice but also promote and preserve competition in the Wisconsin telecommunications industry.

Better access to broadband, as proposed in this project, gives residents and businesses in the area access to better economic, health, and educational opportunities. Better Internet would make it easier for adults to pursue and participate in post-graduate education programs or further job certifications online, thereby increasing their chances of finding higher-paying jobs. More reliable internet will allow the elderly population of the region access to specialists that would normally be out of reach due to geographical limitations. Local businesses will run more efficiently with access to internet, including allowing residents to work from home and participate in today's "gig economy" through jobs with Uber, UberEats, or Amazon Prime. Thus, the proposed project promotes economic development of the communities as well as enhances the quality of life for the public.

The proposed project promotes universal service by providing broadband at affordable rates. Hillsboro strives to provide affordable connectivity for broadband service as evidenced by their pricing. In addition to those rates, Hillsboro participates in the Lifeline program providing Federal Lifeline discounts to qualifying Lifeline subscribers, allowing for a \$9.25 Lifeline credit discount to be applied against the monthly service rate. Hillsboro also intends to reach out to communities to ensure that the residents and businesses are aware of the offerings available through marketing and one-on-one customer connections with technicians and/or service representatives.

#### **4.5 Evaluation Criteria: This Application's Criteria Merit Points**

a. **Matching Funds (10 points).**

This application includes matching funds of 25%.

b. **Public-private Partnerships (10 points).**

While Hillsboro is always open to participating with public partners, this project does not entail a public-private partnership. Hillsboro is actively engaged in the community as open to working with community organizations on the proposed project.

c. **Existing Broadband Service (15 points).**

This application is proposing to serve an underserved area.

d. **Project Impact (15 points).**

This application proposes to provide a higher performance service.

e. **Scalability (5 points).**

Hillsboro has the capability to increase the size or scope of its broadband network over time.

f. **Economic Development (10 points).**

The proposed project has the potential to promote job growth or retention, expand the property tax base or improve the overall economic vitality of the region.

g. **Effect Upon Broadband Service to Adjacent Areas (5 points).**

This application will not impair the ability of a competing broadband service provider to extend broadband service to areas adjacent to the proposed project.

## Appendix A

Hillsboro does have 23 project locations included that are depicted as served in the Wisconsin Broadband Map however, Appendix A includes the supporting data that the areas are underserved. Specifically, 15 of the locations that are depicted as served on the Wisconsin Broadband Map the reported existing provider's website returned results of the actual speed(s) available at the addresses in question, and results returned were under 25Mbps download and 3Mbps upload. The providers website details for each location are provided below:

### E18536 County Road W

The screenshot shows the CenturyLink website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with the CenturyLink logo and the text "Your Internet Speed". Below this, a central card displays "Up to 10 Mbps" and "\$50/mo". The card also mentions "Monthly prepayment required. Additional taxes, fees, and surcharges apply. Offer Details." and lists features: "No annual contract" and "Unlimited data on a 99.9% reliable network". A small text box explains: "To keep things simple, we only show you the fastest speed available at your address. At lower speeds are the same \$50/mo." Below the card is a "Continue" button. At the bottom of the card, it says "More Details". Below the card, a message states: "We also have 10 Mbps download with 1 Mbps upload speed available at this address. Contact us to order." The footer contains links for "About Lumen", "About CenturyLink", "Careers", "Investor Relations", "Legal", "Legal Notices", "Privacy Policy", "Site Map", "Tariffs", "Customers with Disabilities", and "Contact Us". The bottom of the page shows a Windows taskbar with the time 10:40 AM and date 3/12/2022.

## E18172 County Road W

The screenshot shows the CenturyLink website with a message indicating that the location entered is outside the service area. The message includes the address entered: E18172 County Road W, Elroy, WI 53929. It offers a "Change Address" button and provides information about CenturyLink's Long Distance services and HughesNet satellite internet service. The HughesNet section states that CenturyLink is unable to provide internet service at this address and suggests contacting HughesNet, America's #1 choice for high-speed satellite internet. It also mentions that HughesNet is a high-speed internet service via satellite available for homes all over the country, including those in rural areas, with fast download speeds of up to 25 Mbps. A "Find Providers" button is also visible.

Sorry! The location you entered is outside of our service area.

Even if you're outside of CenturyLink's service area, we can still help you.

If you are looking for CenturyLink® Long Distance services (both nationwide and international calling), we have several plans to choose from.

Moveano can help you find other phone, internet and TV service providers in your area.

Other options for internet service may be available.

Address Entered:  
E18172 County Road W, Elroy, WI 53929

[Change Address](#)

Need help finding providers in your area?

We'll help you find internet, TV and home phone providers in your area.

[Find Providers](#)

Get connected with **CenturyLink & HughesNet** : 844-411-9841

**HughesNet**  
AUTHORIZED RETAILER

At this time, CenturyLink is unable to provide internet service at your address. Please contact HughesNet, America's #1 choice for high-speed satellite internet.

HughesNet is a high-speed internet service via satellite that's available for homes all over the country, including those in rural areas — and with fast download speeds of up to 25 Mbps.\*

\*Actual speeds may vary and are not guaranteed.

## E18164 County Road W

The screenshot shows the CenturyLink website displaying internet speed details for the address E18164 County Road W, Elroy, WI 53929. The main offer is "Up to 10 Mbps" for "\$50/mo". It includes a list of features: No annual contract, Unlimited data on a 99.9% reliable network, and HD streaming on 1 device. A "Continue" button is present. A "Change Address" button is also visible in the top right corner. The bottom of the page contains a footer with links to About Us, Contact Us, and other resources.

CenturyLink

Your Internet Speed

Up to 10 Mbps

\$50/mo

Monthly prepayment required. Additional taxes, fees, and surcharges apply. Offer Details

- No annual contract
- Unlimited data on a 99.9% reliable network
- HD streaming on 1 device

Why don't I see other speeds?

[More Details](#)

[Continue](#)

We also have 10 Mbps download with 1 Mbps upload speed available at this address.  
[Contact us to order.](#)

[Change Address](#)

855-448-6382

E18164 COUNTY ROAD W, ELROY, WI 53929

[About Us](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Careers](#) | [Investor Relations](#) | [Legal](#) | [Legal Notices](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Terms](#) | [Customers with Disabilities](#) | [Contact Us](#)

Residential | Small Business | Enterprise



## E18402A County Road WW

The screenshot shows the CenturyLink website with a message indicating that the location entered is outside of their service area. The address entered is E18402A County Road WW, Elroy, WI 53629. The page offers options to change the address or find providers in the area. A HughesNet advertisement is also visible at the bottom.

Sorry! The location you entered is outside of our service area.

Even if you're outside of CenturyLink's service area, we can still help you:

If you are looking for CenturyLink® Long Distance services (both nationwide and international calling), we have several plans to choose from.

Moreover, we can help you find other phone, internet and TV service providers in your area.

Other options for internet service may be available.

Address Entered:  
E18402A County Road WW, Elroy, WI 53629

[Change Address](#)

Need help finding providers in your area?

We'll help you find internet, TV and home phone providers in your area.

[Find Providers](#)

Get connected with **CenturyLink & HughesNet** : 844-411-9841

**HughesNet**  
AUTHORIZED RETAILER

At this time, CenturyLink is unable to provide internet service at your address. Please contact HughesNet, America's #1 choice for high-speed satellite internet.

HughesNet is a high-speed internet service via satellite that's available for homes all over the country, including those in rural areas — and with fast download speeds of 25 Mbps.\*

\*Actual speeds may vary and are not guaranteed.

## S589 County Road WW

The screenshot shows the CenturyLink website displaying internet speed details for the address S589 County Road WW, Elroy, WI 53629. The page indicates a speed of up to 10 Mbps for \$50/month. It lists features such as no annual contract, unlimited data on a 99.9% reliable network, and HD streaming on 1 device. A 'Continue' button is visible at the bottom.

CenturyLink

Your Internet Speed

Up to 10 Mbps

\$50/mo

Monthly prepayment required. Additional taxes, fees, and surcharges apply. Offer Details

- No annual contract
- Unlimited data on a 99.9% reliable network
- HD streaming on 1 device

Why don't I see other speeds?

[More Details](#)

[Continue](#)

We also have 10 Mbps download with 1 Mbps upload speed available at this address. [Contact us to order.](#)

5589 COUNTY ROAD WW, ELROY, WI 53629

[Change Address](#)

855-449-6382

Feedback

About Us | About CenturyLink | Careers | Investor Relations | Legal | Legal Notices | Privacy Policy | Site Map | Tariffs | Customers with Disabilities | Contact Us

Residential | Small Business | Enterprise

## S192 Oak Lane

The screenshot shows the CenturyLink website with the title "Your Internet Speed". The main offer is "Up to 10 Mbps" for "\$50/mo". Below this, it states "Monthly prepayment required. Additional taxes, fees, and surcharges apply. Offer Details". The offer includes:

- No annual contract
- Unlimited data on a 99.9% reliable network
- HD streaming on 1 device

Below the offer, it says "Why don't I see other speeds?" and "More Details". A green "Continue" button is at the bottom. A note at the bottom states: "We also have 10 Mbps download with 1 Mbps upload speed available at this address. Contact us to order." In the top right corner, there is a location pin for "S192 OAK LN, ELROY, WI 53929" with a "Change Address" button. The footer includes links for "About Lumen", "About CenturyLink", "Careers", "Investor Relations", "Legal", "Legal Notices", "Privacy Policy", "Site Map", "Tariffs", "Customers with Disabilities", "Contact Us", "Residential", "Smart Business", and "Enterprise". The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows the time as 12:08 PM on 3/12/2022.

## S155 Oak Lane

The screenshot shows the CenturyLink website with the title "Your Internet Speed". The main offer is "Up to 10 Mbps" for "\$50/mo". Below this, it states "Monthly prepayment required. Additional taxes, fees, and surcharges apply. Offer Details". The offer includes:

- No annual contract
- Unlimited data on a 99.9% reliable network
- HD streaming on 1 device

Below the offer, it says "Why don't I see other speeds?" and "More Details". A green "Continue" button is at the bottom. A note at the bottom states: "We also have 10 Mbps download with 1 Mbps upload speed available at this address. Contact us to order." In the top right corner, there is a location pin for "S155 OAK LN, ELROY, WI 53929" with a "Change Address" button. The footer includes links for "About Lumen", "About CenturyLink", "Careers", "Investor Relations", "Legal", "Legal Notices", "Privacy Policy", "Site Map", "Tariffs", "Customers with Disabilities", "Contact Us", "Residential", "Smart Business", and "Enterprise". The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows the time as 12:11 PM on 3/12/2022.

## E18097 Shaker RD

The screenshot shows the CenturyLink website with the heading "Your Internet Speed". A central box displays an offer of "Up to 10 Mbps" for "\$50/mo". Below this, it lists features: "Monthly prepayment required. Additional taxes, fees, and surcharges apply. Offer Details", "No annual contract", "Unlimited data on a 99.9% reliable network", and "HD streaming on 1 device". A link "Why don't I see other speeds? More Details" is present, followed by a green "Continue" button. At the bottom, it states "We also have 10 Mbps download with 1 Mbps upload speed available at this address. Contact us to order." In the top right corner, a location dropdown shows "E18097 SH..." and "E18097 SHAKER RD, ELROY, MI 53929" with a "Change Address" button. The footer includes links for "About Lumen", "About CenturyLink", "Careers", "Investor Relations", "Legal", "Legal Notices", "Privacy Policy", "Site Map", "Tariffs", "Customers with Disabilities", and "Contact Us". The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows the time as 12:12 PM on 3/12/2022.

## E18094 Shaker Rd

This screenshot is similar to the one above, showing the CenturyLink website for address E18094 Shaker Rd. The central offer box is identical, displaying "Up to 10 Mbps" for "\$50/mo" with the same feature list and "Continue" button. The location dropdown in the top right shows "E18094 SH..." and "E18094 SHAKER RD, ELROY, MI 53929" with a "Change Address" button. The footer and Windows taskbar (showing 12:14 PM on 3/12/2022) are also present.

## E18098 Shaker Rd

The screenshot shows the CenturyLink website with the title "Your Internet Speed". The main offer is "Up to 10 Mbps" for "\$50/mo". The offer details include: "Monthly prepayment required. Additional taxes, fees, and surcharges apply. Offer Details", "No annual contract", "Unlimited data on a 99.9% reliable network", and "HD streaming on 1 device". A "Continue" button is at the bottom of the offer box. To the right, a location pin shows "E18098 SHAKER RD, ELROY, WI 53929" with a "Change Address" button. The footer contains links for "About Lumen", "About CenturyLink", "Careers", "Investor Relations", "Legal", "Legal Notices", "Privacy Policy", "Site Map", "Tariffs", "Customers with Disabilities", and "Contact Us". It also lists "Residential", "Small Business", and "Enterprise" services. The copyright notice is "© 2022 CenturyLink. All Rights Reserved." The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows the time as 12:18 PM on 3/12/2022.

## S223 Willow Rd

The screenshot shows the CenturyLink website with the title "Your Internet Speed". The main offer is "Up to 20 Mbps" for "\$50/mo". The offer details include: "Monthly prepayment required. Additional taxes, fees, and surcharges apply. Offer Details", "No annual contract", "Unlimited data on a 99.9% reliable network", and "HD streaming on 2 devices". A "Continue" button is at the bottom of the offer box. To the right, a location pin shows "S223 WILLOW RD, ELROY, WI 53929" with a "Change Address" button. Below the offer box, there is a note: "Receive 12 months of EPIX NOW with online orders. ^". At the bottom, there is a disclaimer: "Limited time, online offer. New CenturyLink (former customers (DOM speed and higher) residing in select locations only. Restrictions apply. See Details." and another note: "We also have 10 Mbps download with 1 Mbps upload speed available at this address. Contact us to order." The footer contains links for "About Lumen", "About CenturyLink", "Careers", "Investor Relations", "Legal", "Legal Notices", "Privacy Policy", "Site Map", "Tariffs", "Customers with Disabilities", and "Contact Us". It also lists "Residential", "Small Business", and "Enterprise" services. The copyright notice is "© 2022 CenturyLink. All Rights Reserved." The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows the time as 12:19 PM on 3/12/2022.

## S245 Willow Rd

The screenshot shows the CenturyLink website's 'Your Internet Speed' page. The browser's address bar displays 'shop.centurylink.com/offers'. The page features the CenturyLink logo and a location pin for 'S245 WILLOW RD, EUROY, WI 53929'. A central box displays 'Up to 15 Mbps' and '\$50/mo'. Below this, it lists features: 'Monthly prepayment required', 'Additional taxes, fees, and surcharges apply. Offer Details', 'No annual contract', 'Unlimited data on a 99.9% reliable network', and 'HD streaming on 1 device'. A 'Continue' button is at the bottom of the box. A 'Change Address' button is located near the location pin. The footer contains links for 'About Us', 'Contact Us', and 'Feedback'.

CenturyLink

Your Internet Speed

855-449-6382

S245 WILLOW RD, EUROY, WI 53929

Change Address

Up to 15 Mbps

\$50/mo

Monthly prepayment required. Additional taxes, fees, and surcharges apply. Offer Details

- No annual contract
- Unlimited data on a 99.9% reliable network
- HD streaming on 1 device

Why don't I see other speeds?

More Details

Continue

We also have 10 Mbps download with 1 Mbps upload speed available at this address. Contact us to order.

About Us | Contact Us | Careers | Investor Relations | Legal | Legit Notices | Privacy Policy | Site Map | Terms | Customers with Disabilities | Contact Us

Residential | Small Business | Enterprise

## S387A Willow Rd

The screenshot shows the CenturyLink website's 'Sorry! The location you entered is outside of our service area.' page. The browser's address bar displays 'centurylink.com/sor/7isd=homeOOR'. The page features the CenturyLink logo and a location pin for 'S387A Willow Rd, Euroy, WI 53929'. A central box displays the message 'Sorry! The location you entered is outside of our service area.' and a 'Change Address' button. Below this, it lists services: 'Even if you're outside of CenturyLink's service area, we can still help you:', 'If you are looking for CenturyLink® Long Distance services (both nationwide and international calling), we have several plans to choose from.', 'Movers can help you find other phone, internet and TV service providers in your area.', and 'Other options for internet service may be available.' The bottom section features the HughesNet logo and a message: 'Get connected with CenturyLink & HughesNet : 844-411-9841'. The HughesNet logo is followed by the text 'AUTHORIZED RETAILER' and a paragraph: 'At this time, CenturyLink is unable to provide internet service at your address. Please contact HughesNet, America's #1 choice for high-speed satellite internet. HughesNet is a high-speed internet service via satellite that's available for homes all over the country, including those in rural areas -- and with fast download speeds of 25 Mbps.\*' A 'Find Providers' button is also visible.

CenturyLink

Sorry! The location you entered is outside of our service area.

Even if you're outside of CenturyLink's service area, we can still help you:

If you are looking for CenturyLink® Long Distance services (both nationwide and international calling), we have several plans to choose from.

Movers can help you find other phone, internet and TV service providers in your area.

Other options for internet service may be available.

Address Entered: S387A Willow Rd, Euroy, WI 53929

Change Address

Need help finding providers in your area?

We'll help you find internet, TV and home phone providers in your area.

Find Providers

Get connected with CenturyLink & HughesNet : 844-411-9841

HughesNet

AUTHORIZED RETAILER

At this time, CenturyLink is unable to provide internet service at your address. Please contact HughesNet, America's #1 choice for high-speed satellite internet.

HughesNet is a high-speed internet service via satellite that's available for homes all over the country, including those in rural areas -- and with fast download speeds of 25 Mbps.\*

\*Actual speeds may vary and are not guaranteed.

## S295B Willow Rd

The screenshot shows the CenturyLink website with a message indicating that the location entered is outside of their service area. The address entered is 5295B Willow Rd, Elroy WI 53629. The page offers options to change the address or find providers in the area. A HughesNet banner is also visible at the bottom of the main content area.

Sorry! The location you entered is outside of our service area.

Even if you're outside of CenturyLink's service area, we can still help you:

If you are looking for CenturyLink® Long Distance services (both nationwide and international calling), we have several plans to choose from.

Moreover, we can help you find other phone, internet and TV service providers in your area.

Other options for internet service may be available.

Address Entered:  
5295B Willow Rd, Elroy WI 53629

[Change Address](#)

Need help finding providers in your area?

We'll help you find internet, TV and home phone providers in your area.

[Find Providers](#)

Get connected with **CenturyLink & HughesNet** : 844-411-9841

**HughesNet**  
AUTHORIZED RETAILER

At this time, CenturyLink is unable to provide internet service at your address. Please contact HughesNet, America's #1 choice for high-speed satellite internet.

HughesNet is a high-speed internet service via satellite that's available for homes all over the country, including those in rural areas — and with fast download speeds of 25 Mbps.\*

\*Actual speeds may vary and are not guaranteed.

## S389 Willow Rd

The screenshot shows the CenturyLink website displaying internet speed details for the address 5389 Willow Rd, Elroy WI 53629. The page highlights a speed of up to 10 Mbps for \$50/month. It lists features such as no annual contract, unlimited data on a 99.9% reliable network, and HD streaming on 1 device. A 'Continue' button is visible at the bottom of the main content area.

CenturyLink

Your Internet Speed

855-449-6382

5389 WILLOW RD, ELROY WI 53629

[Change Address](#)

Up to 10 Mbps

**\$50/mo**

Monthly prepayment required. Additional taxes, fees, and surcharges apply. Offer Details

- No annual contract
- Unlimited data on a 99.9% reliable network
- HD streaming on 1 device

Why don't I see other speeds?

[More Details](#)

[Continue](#)

We also have 10 Mbps download with 1 Mbps upload speed available at this address. [Contact us to order.](#)

About Us | About CenturyLink | Careers | Investor Relations | Legal | Legal Notices | Privacy Policy | Site Map | Tariffs | Customers with Disabilities | Contact Us

Residential | Small Business | Enterprise